

What's Sprouting!

The Newsletter of the Oxford Community Garden Association

May/June 2015



Coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) at the garden;
2014 VNPS Wildflower of the Year
see <http://vnps.org/wildflowers-of-the-year>
for lots of great information about this native plant

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Garden Announcements

Next Upcoming Work Day: Saturday, June 6

Watch for an email from the Garden Committee announcing the hours of our next work day. In case of rain that keeps us out of the garden that day, we'll move it to Sunday. Work days are a good way to connect with other gardeners and with the garden at large. Please come if you can, keeping in mind that all plot holders are required by the rules to contribute to at least 3 work days per year.

Compost Delivered!

We bought a couple loads of compost from the Garden Gin, which were delivered last week. Feel free to use a wheelbarrow load – dig it into your soil or use as a top dressing around your plants, underneath a layer of leaf mulch. Whatever you do, please use it -- the pile is behind the blueberries.

Thank you, plot-holders, from the Garden Committee! Everyone's plots look great! This has to be one of the best ever starts to our garden year. Kudos!

It's Not Too Late to Plant!

If you haven't planted anything yet, click on the link below to look at a chart from MSUCares. It tells you the best dates to plant many different vegetables in northern Mississippi. Then head to the garden center and get some plants. Click on the link here to see it.

<http://msucare.com/lawn/garden/vegetables/planting/map.html> According to this publication, for north Mississippi you can plant pole snap beans until August 1, pole lima beans until July 5, bush lima beans and okra until July 15, southern peas until July 20. We can set out tomato plants until July 20 and sweet potato slips until July 1. If you missed those dates, you can always look forward to planting watermelon around June first.

When you get your plants planted, don't forget to top off your soil with a layer of real mulch. Mulching helps keep weeds down. It also reduces water evaporation from your soil and prevents splashing onto your plants when you water (which can spread soil-borne diseases). Leave a little bit of room around the base of your plants to keep that space aerated. We have a lot of leaf mulch- feel free to use it liberally!

Being Garden-Ready at Any Moment

You know your garden only requires a few minutes of work a week, maybe two or three days a week. So, why do you end up neglecting it sometimes? I have been gardening for several years at the Oxford Community Garden. As many times as I drive by the garden each week, I often felt unprepared to jump out of the car and spontaneously pull a weed or do a little watering. So, this year I decided to make a gardening box for my car. I found a plastic box with a lid that clamps on top. Then I filled it with the things I always wished I had: a sharp pruner, a pair of sunglasses, a container of fertilizer, some Benadryl, a bandage, some extra gloves, and hair band and a big handkerchief to keep my hair out of my face. Finally, I included a big pack of wipes for when I get dirty but don't have time to go home and wash my hands before the next errand. You could also include your favorite sprayer nozzle or other tool, some markers or a scissors and a hat. I've just bought some sun block and a water bottle to add to the box.



If you have anything you do to make gardening easier, put a comment on the website or write to me at msglyptodon@gmail.com. Thanks.

What to Plant Now: Herbs

I have experienced vegetable garden disasters --blossom-end rot on my tomatoes, beans with holes in them, and strawberries eaten by birds. Throughout all the difficulties, my herbs have kept growing. Of course, you can't feed your family on herbs, but they do make a meal much more interesting, so I always make sure to keep several varieties growing.

According to the MSU website: "Don't expect to harvest armloads of English Lavender blooms or great handfuls of French Tarragon. Sage and Thyme can be difficult to grow, disappearing mysteriously after a few years. Don't blame yourself. These perennial herbs should be considered short-lived plants in our hot, humid climate. Count yourself lucky if you get three or four years from these herbs before they pass on." I've never had much luck with lavender, and never tried to grow tarragon, but my sage, mint and oregano have been going for five years now next to a pot of parsley and chives. My rosemary died the winter before last when it got below zero, but it was doing well, too. Maybe the secret is that I grow them in partial shade in pots. My only problem has been that the deer eat them when it gets really dry in the summer, so sometimes I move the pots to the fenced part of my yard. (I liked imagining that the other deer shunned the deer that ate my chives because of its terrible breath). The only other care that I give them is to water when it's really dry and to shake some slow release fertilizer pellets on them in the spring. The MSU website goes on to mention that a major cause of failure with herbs in the south is a lack of drainage in the soil. They suggest using a container or a raised bed. Fortunately, most of the Community Garden has a lot of sand in the soil, so drainage is not a big issue. A raised bed certainly can't hurt, and it gives all your plants room to develop healthy roots. The herbs recommended for our area include Texas tarragon (*Tagetes lucida*), catnip, German chamomile, Spanish Lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*), chives, and mints. I keep my mints in a pot because they spread and take over.

Visit With a Gardener

This month I met with Kathy Wachter, Oxford Community Garden Super member and Education Coordinator. Kathy moved to Oxford from Louisville, KY in 1997, and she has been working around family gardens most of her life. She's been volunteering with the Community Garden since the garden's second year.

In her first days with the Community Garden, Kathy worked on the Community Harvest plots, helping to expand and clear them. For three years, she served as the Community Garden's treasurer. She has a plot by the east side fence, where she grows arugula, cilantro, onions, and Errol Casten's cherry tomatoes with great success. Kathy also gardens at home, but confesses that some of her best crops there have come from "free," plants-- seedlings plucked out of her compost heap. These have included cantaloupe, watermelon and tomatoes. Turning the compost pile accelerates decomposition, but getting free seedlings gives you an excuse to just let it lie. Kathy admits that she never turns hers.

I asked Kathy about her favorite plants to grow, and they include herbs. Sometimes, when she has a lot of Rosemary, she donates it to Honeybee Bakery or the Lusa Bakery. I did not ask, but I'm hoping she gets a free scone once in a while.

Because she works in Marketing, Kathy is working on ways to help promote the garden. Some of her ideas include square foot gardening demonstrations, and having chefs grilling in the garden. If Kathy has taken your picture, you know that another of her projects is a plan to put everyone's picture on the website with plot numbers and first names. This is one way to help everyone in the garden to get to know each other better. She welcomes input and help from people who are interested in recruiting corporate sponsors or coordinating educational activities. Let her know what educational activities you would like to see in the garden this year. You can contact her at kwachter@olemiss.edu.

Seasonal Recipe-Fruity Mint Punch

Have you noticed all the mint that has escaped from people's plots into the pathways and corners of the garden? This recipe is my way of trying to help control the spreading mint. There is chocolate mint at the southwest corner of the garden fence, but most of what we have looks like peppermint. Grab a handful and make yourself a delicious drink. I'm sure it will grow back soon.

Fruity Mint Punch

5 cups strong tea
2 cups fresh orange juice
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
1 1/2 cups sugar
1/2 cup water
2 1/4 tablespoons grated orange rind
1/2 cup peppermint leaves (or other mint), chopped fine

Put tea, orange juice and lemon juice in a 2-quart pitcher.

In a saucepan, combine sugar, water and orange rind. Heat to boiling over high heat. After boiling for 5 minutes, remove from heat and add mint. Cover and steep for 5 -10 minutes. Strain, put in pitcher and serve cold.



Do you have comments, questions or contributions? Contact your OCGA newsletter editor, Ashley Brewer, at msglyptodon@gmail.com. Find the Oxford Community Garden on Facebook, or at our website, ocga.org